



Barricade, Rue Soufflot, Paris, February 1848, painting by Horace Vernet

Origin of the National Republic

The Great French Revolution that started in 1789 did not immediately produce a lasting democratic republic in France. Napoleon Bonaparte's Empire, launched with a *coup d'état* on 9 November 1799, had attacked feudal monarchs all over Europe. But these events were followed during the next three decades by the restoration of weak versions of the French monarchy, culminating in the "July Monarchy" of Louis Philippe. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels anticipated a coming revolutionary upsurge and published the [Communist Manifesto](#) at the beginning of the revolutionary year of 1848.

The Manifesto's first major section is called "Bourgeois and Proletarians" and it says among other things that: *"Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other - bourgeoisie and proletariat."*



Karl Marx arrested in Brussels, March 1848, drawing, N Khukov

Yet it was Marx in particular, in two great books and one short Address (see the attached and/or the links below), who described, better than anyone else, the much less simple, more complex, permutations of class conflict at the time. For example, in the following cut from "[The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte](#)" (find attached, or please download your file via the link below) it is clear that the proletariat suffered

an almost immediate disaster, because it had no allies. The proletariat was isolated and attacked by all the other classes together, and massacred, in June of 1848 in Paris.

This is the situation that the proletariat must always avoid, and it is one reason why the working class must always have allies. Here is the cut from Marx's outline of events, given in the "18th Brumaire":

"a. May 4 to June 25, 1848. Struggle of all classes against the proletariat. Defeat of the proletariat in the June days.

"b. June 25 to December 10, 1848. Dictatorship of the pure bourgeois republicans. Drafting of the constitution. Proclamation of a state of siege in Paris. The bourgeois dictatorship set aside on December 10 by the election of Bonaparte as President."

In the "18th Brumaire", not only do the contenders of the Great French Revolution, the Aristocracy, the Peasantry (sometimes called the *Montagne*), the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat reappear. Also described are the clear contradictions within the bourgeois class. Plus the classless, manipulative Bonaparte, who played the four main classes off against each other for more than two decades until he lost the plot. And notably the "lumpen-proletariat" of idle adventurers who were Bonaparte's willing, and paid (with "whisky and sausages") accomplices.

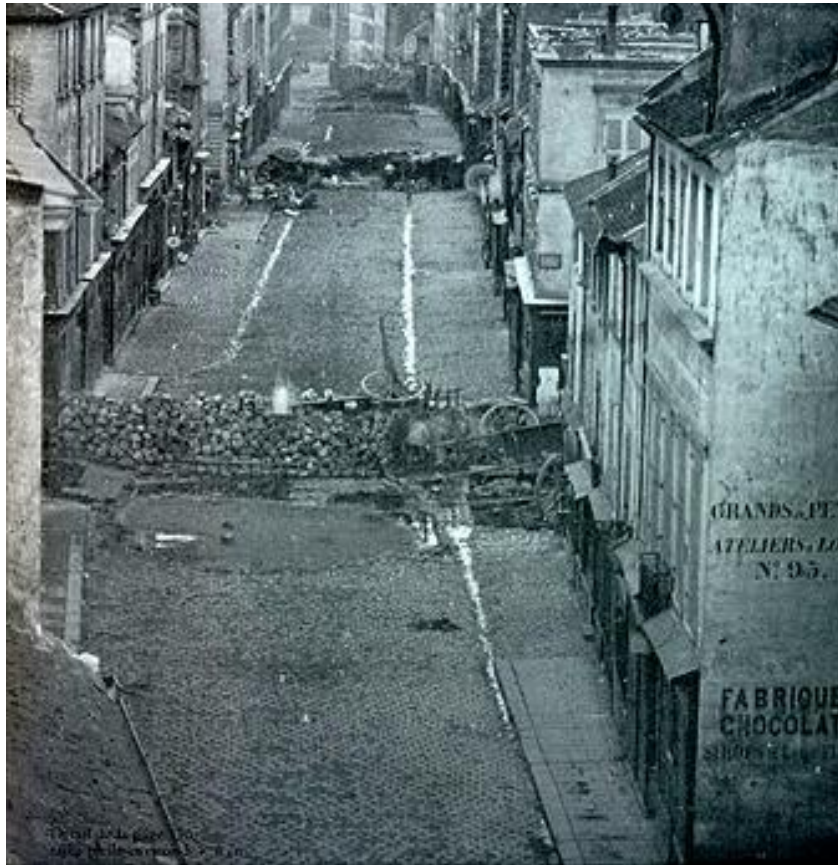


Berlin, March 1848, painting

In his March 1850 Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League Marx spoke in particular of Germany, which had also caught the revolutionary enthusiasm, again in terms of a precise and dynamic comprehension of the patterns and permutations of class contradiction, and of who must ally with whom at any particular moment.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were deeply, personally and very effectively involved in these events as individuals and as organisers, and in Engels' case as a military combatant.

These events shaped the new form of democratic republic that was consolidated in France after the eventual fall of Louis Bonaparte in 1871, and after the brief life of the Paris Commune.



Barricade, Paris, June 1848, photograph

That newly-formed kind of “democratic bourgeois republic” still remains the standard form of nation-state in the world, and it is the same kind that our republic has become, here in South Africa.

This historic understanding, as well as the unsurpassed clarity with which Marx in particular describes the nature of practical multi-class struggle, can serve to prepare us for a progressively more specific, historical examination of the theory and practice of National Democratic Revolution (NDR) through the 20th Century, in Africa, and in South Africa up to the present time.

The NDR is nothing if it is not about class alliance, and about democracy on the national scale.

Marx's "[The Class Struggles in France](#)" (please find attached or download the extract linked below) is also a study in class alliance, and it complements the "18th Brumaire". It is a detailed account of the revolutionary events in France from 1848 onwards, including the rise of Louis Bonaparte. Marx was frequently in Paris during this period.

What "The Class Struggles in France" does for us here, early in our course on the National Democratic Revolution, is to demonstrate the realities and permutations of class conflict. It shows once again how the working class must have allies, and it shows how treacherous, brutal and ruthless the bourgeoisie can be. It also shows how lightning-fast revolutionary events can be. The period covered by chapter 1 is only four months, from February to June, and yet almost everything that can happen in a revolution, happened in that time. The question of the republic arises, and the necessity of supporting it. The revolutionary national democracy is crucial.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The 18th Brumaire of Louis ;Bonaparte, Chapters 1 and 7, Marx, and Class Struggles in France, Part 1, The Defeat of June 1848, Marx.](#)
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